An Essay:
on the use of

Water as a Medicine:
submitted to the Faculty
of the

UNIVERSITY
of

PENNSYLVANIA.
For the

Degree of Doctor of Medicine.
March 1829.

By Joab Wright.
of Leesburg Ohio.

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The subject to which I shall call your attention is, the use of Water, as a medicine, but as this takes in too wide a range for my limits, in its most extended sense, I shall endeavour to dispose of it, by principally confining my-self to its use in a few certain diseases, and that too, for the most part, when applied in a certain form.

I shall endeavour to point out some of the indications to which I think water best adapted from my own experience and observations; yet as I have not come here prepared with notes or memorandums, for such a task, I must offer this as an apology, for this feeble and very imperfect performance

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Water a Medicine.

To understand the physical and chemical properties of water, it is necessary to study some of the most approved modern chemical Authorities

Water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen. It unites synthetically with, and enters into the composition of, most medicines of the different kingdoms of nature. Mineral Vegitable and Animal. It is capable of assuming the solid and fluid states. It is a conductor of electricity, and calorie, for which it has a considerable capacity

Water combines with various mineral substances, forming different mineral waters, well known and much celebrated for their medical uses.

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Water is a very powerful therapeutic agent, both in its simple and compound forms. It has been found to possess properties, by which it is entitled to a place in many of the various classes of medicine, and to answer many important indications in diverse diseases.

The learned Dr. Coxe, professor of Materia medica of this school, has done himself the honour of introducing Water into the list of valuable medicines in his Dispensatory, in which he speaks of it, in terms with which I most cordially concur. But it would surpass my limits to treat of its various forms, as found in nature. As spring water, rain water, river water, well water, snow water, lake water, marsh water, sea water, distilled water and

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the various artificial preparations of this article, yet as it has found its way into the American Pharmacopea, I hope our country may not be last, in more fully testing its medical powers.

These hints are so hastily drawn up, that any attempt to give a regular, and systematic classification, must be subject to too many inadvertencies to be of publick utility.

Water is not only indicated in a great number of diseases, as the most important corrector of the morbid condition; but it is resorted to as an instrument to combat symptoms in most diseases, in some form or other, throughout medical and surgical practice.

Indeed, to point out all the relations, in which water stands connected

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with the vital functions in their patho=logical condition, all its therapeutic pow=ers, in preventing, arresting, alleviating and curing disease, and all the symptoms, that have attended these various diseases, in which practitioners have successfully applied this remedy, would require volumes, and lead into too great prolixity for my pre=sent purpose.

It is recommended in various forms of fever, particularly those, in which venesection is inadmissible; as Typhus and Typhoid fevers. In the form of cold baths cold drinks, Cynanche Maligna shower bath is best.

In Trismus, scarlatina, odontalgia, epistaxis, menorrhagia, mania, Hydrocph=alus, Gangrene, Rheumatism, burns &c. All of which are to be treated with cold

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water, mostly in the form of shower baths. And Epilepsy and Convulsions which are much relieved by warm bathing at times.

The number of high Authorities, which have successfully employed this remedy, from the earliest records of our science to the present day, must certainly be sufficient to recommend it to every member of the profession, as a very powerful Therapeutic agent. Yet the great number and variety of medical means, the propensity in many to fear what they believe to be innovation, the difficulties in overcoming the prejudices against it, especially to the shower bath, the commonness of the article, and the negligence of patients and attendants, in attending to prescriptions, have been so many means of consigning to this simple article, a situation far beneath its real worth.

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I do not lay claim to any new discovery, as the use of cold bath is as old as Hippocrates, yet as there are several auxiliaries to its successful operation, as sulphat of quinine, the different forms of opium &c.

The diseases in which water has been employed, for the most part, and in which it has been recommended by the greatest number of Authorities, are fevers, and that too in its simple form, particularly the bath.

Hippocrates employed it as a refrigerant by applying napkins wetted with cold water to the head, and various parts of the body, frequently renovated. He mostly used it in fever of a malignant type.

Celsus also, it seems, was not insensible of its power, in disease, where fever was connected more particularly with nervous derangement.

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Drs. Willis, Floyer and Baynard aroused the attention of the English, which like that of cities and most populous parts of the several countries have to lean on Pharmaceutic convenience

As early as 1630 Millot and Hernault, of Paris, used it externally with success, as a refrigerant.

Cold water was not only, used as a medicine in England and the eastern Continent, externally but it was subjected to internal exhibition, with decided advantage also. As is obvious from Dr Hancock's Febrifugum Magnum, or Common water best cure for fevers 1752.

Dr Cyrillo wrote a paper which was published in the Philosophical Transactions on this subject recommending its use. Snow and snow water, were, occasionally resorted to with success

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Palina recommended cold water both internally and externally.

Professor Wildenbrand of Vienna In his extensive practice in the Armies of Austria, employed the cold bath, effusion of cold water, frictions with snow in the commencement of fever.

It appears that it proved a very judicious application as a refrigirant, either internally or externally. That the insensibility of the system was such, as to protect it against any injury that might have been justly apprehended, in a different state of the constitution.

Dr Wright, of Jamaica, was first among the moderns, to point out this as a means of preserving the precious few drops of the chief supporter of life, when the digestive powers are incapable

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of redressing any mistake, that might attend the use of the lance from disguised appearances.

Dr Currie of Liverpool, has also added the weight of his extensive influence, with so great a number of fever cases, as well as some other forms of disease, that the medical world are ready to acknowledge that Typhus fever has been arrested in a remarkable degree; but that there are only particular cases in which it would be safe. Thus making a matter of difficulty of a practice, which by proper attention to a few simple rules, would be as easily managed as any plan of treatment whatever, that promises a happy issue.

Indeed, this great pathologist has given a more definite bounds to his manner of treatment, than any of his predecessors. but it does not follow hence, that he has

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Dr Currie

completed the task of discovery and definition as relates to its successful application, in this and all other diseases to which it is more especially appropriate.

Nor is he alone in his extending this agent to other diseases, as they have been found to resist most other plans of treatment.

It has been extensively used in cynanche maligna, or putrid sore throat. We have, by combining this with other compatible means, found it in this disease attended with signal success.

Notwithstanding neither of these great pathologists have been able to give a satisfactory solution of its modus operandi in answering the respective indications to which it has been so successfully applied; Yet Dr Currie seems to have prudently drawn

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lines by which all may be directed in their application of it to very beneficial results.

I have not pretended a complete history of the subject, but only a very brief outline. Neither is it my aim, in the following remarks, to praise the medicine for, or the diseases to which it is adapted to an unnecessary prolixity.

I have found by a number of cases, in which I have tried the bath, that the delirium was removed, and a more perfect and speedy intermission, in cases of remittent and continued fever, obtained by this than any other means. When this intermission occurs at so early a period, our chance is much better for cleansing the stomach by emetics, cathartics &c. next, if there be no counter indication, give the quinine in large doses, at once anticipating the paroxysm.

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The time I have preferred for giving the bath in case of fever, was when the paroxysm was at its greatest acme. In cases of very low pulse when the disease has been of very long duration or produced an uncommon degree of real debility; then it will be of eminent advantage, if no local congestion or inflamation be present, to give cayenne, ginger or some such preparation. I have when epistaxes, or any other cause, has suddenly reduced the patient, and an intractable coldness of the extremities supervened, applied the vapour bath with decided advantage, still taking care to accompany it with ~~stimulant~~ preparations.

I might give many cases to the point but shall conclude by making a few observations, I have applied the bath in chronick cases of disease, of various kinds, all to good effect.

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I had the opportunity of applying the shower bath in one case of tiismus, of a titanic character, which was cured by it in a few weeks. And great relief was experienced in ten minutes after our first application.

The various kinds of baths that have been used, from Hippocrates to the present time, both natural and artificial, are very numerous. The shower, the Tepid, the warm, the vapour, the Bathwaters hot bath &c. Recommended by Drs. Wright, Currie Saunders, Falconer, Lewis, Gibbs, ~~and the~~ noted empiric Graham & Thompson, the last name mentioned, who, with his party, go by the name of steam Doctors, he, having obtained a patent for his vapour bath & some auxiliary means, has drawn a very numerous party into his plans of using the vapour and medicated baths & ablutions.

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and Falconer, the English spring baths contain so small a proportion of Iron and no sulphur (except the last suspected sulphur, but the others deny this). That (Agreable to Dr Saunders' notion) its effects must depend, principally, on the temperature of the water.

Dr Currie formerly made his time to exclude the claims of all who had any sense of chillings or general or profuse perspiration. He observes, that it might be carried so far as to extinguish animation entirely. Yet no part of this precaution ought to deprive a patient of the benefits, even of a shower bath. It is true, it would be very possible to distroy any person with too long confinement in or under a shower of cold water. Yet if the System be properly prepared, by appropriate stimulants given either by injections or the common way, or by warming by the vapour bath in

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addition to the above stimulants, the system may not only be in a degree chilly, but it may be in as profuse a state of general perspiration as it is proper to excite for any purpose. It is very true, that in time of a regular chill, in intermittent or remittent fever, it would in the general and perhaps in all cases, be wholly unsafe, and many times, has, without the proper stimulant proved fatal; There can never be any case, I apprehend, where in it would not be better to wait till the fever arose or never employ it at all

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N. L.

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